

# NRCS At A Glance



photo: Chris Coulon

## NRCS Mission

To provide leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, improve, and sustain our natural resources and environment

## NRCS Vision

Harmony between people and the land

## People in Partnership for a Healthy Environment

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) works hand-in-hand with the American people to conserve natural resources on private lands. Approximately 72 percent of the land in Michigan is private land. We help land users approach conservation planning and implementation with an understanding of how natural resources relate to each other and to all of us and how our activities affect those resources.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service, formerly the Soil Conservation Service, was created as a national response to the Dust Bowl catastrophe of the 1930's. Hugh Hammond Bennett, the agency's first chief, convinced Congress that soil erosion was a national menace, that a permanent agency was needed within the U.S. Department of Agriculture to call landowners' attention to their land stewardship opportunities and responsibilities, and that a partnership of federal agencies with local communities was needed to help farmers and ranchers conserve their land.

Today the NRCS, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's lead conservation agency, still speaks to the health and well-being of soil, water, air, plants, and animals. Indeed, no other federal agency speaks for the health and fate of America's private land.

The following principles are NRCS's heritage and still guide its work:

- Assess the resources on the land, the conservation problems and opportunities.
- Draw on various sciences, disciplines and partners and integrate all their contributions into a plan for the whole property.
- Work closely with land users so that the plans for conservation mesh with their objectives.
- Through implementing conservation on individual properties, contribute to the overall quality of the life in the watershed or region.

## NRCS Services and Products

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) employees and volunteers provide science-based services and products to managers and owners of private lands that assist them in making wise land use decisions.

## Technical Assistance For Conservation Planning and Application

NRCS technical assistance helps customers decide which conservation practices and systems will best address natural resource concerns and meet their economic goals. The planning assistance ranges from a site specific plan to one that covers a larger geographic area.

Technical and cost-share assistance helps customers apply planned conservation practices and systems. This assistance can include design, specifications, construction and management.

## Financial Assistance for Application of Conservation

The NRCS offers multiple financial assistance programs to encourage the voluntary conservation of natural resources on private land.

## Resources Information and Technology

The NRCS also provides resource information and technology through assessments conducted to indicate status, condition, and trends of natural resources on private lands. Resource assessments are a necessary step in understanding resource issues and identifying and addressing conservation problems. Science-based technical tools - technical guides and performance specifications and standards - assure the quality and consistency of conservation planning and application.

Local people - individually and collectively - decide how to use NRCS capabilities in the natural resource conservation planning and application process. NRCS' role is to support and facilitate these individual and local decisions based upon good resource information.

## Customers Are Not the Only Ones Who Benefit

Ultimately, every person who drinks water and eats food benefits from the work NRCS does. The benefits translate beyond a landscape into benefits to communities. Studies have shown that every dollar NRCS invests in technical and financial assistance to improve natural resources triggers a \$4.89 stimulus for rural economies and the people of Michigan.

Individuals and groups who own or manage Michigan's private lands are the people who most directly use our programs and services:

- Farmers, ranchers and others who manage privately owned lands
- Water management groups
- Rural and urban community leaders and members
- Local and state government officials
- Other individuals, groups, and associations with an interest or focus on natural resource issues

## A Staff of Technically Sound, Field-Based Employees

The strength of NRCS is in its workforce - the men and women who work side-by-side with the owners and managers of America's privately owned land. These are the NRCS employees who have the technical expertise and field experience to help land users solve their natural resource challenges and maintain and improve

their ability to thrive economically. NRCS employees are highly skilled in many scientific and technical specialties, including soil science, soil conservation, agronomy, biology, forestry, engineering, geology, hydrology, cultural resources, and economics. The NRCS has developed a highly regarded reputation for quality technical assistance and conservation technology.

## Partners

NRCS collaborates with many partners to set conservation goals, to provide the high quality technical assistance to people who work the land, and to leverage the federal contributions to natural resource conservation on private lands. These partners include:

- Conservation districts
- County governments
- Tribal Governments
- State and other federal agencies
- NRCS Earth Team volunteers
- Agricultural and environmental groups
- Professional societies

The state's 82 conservation districts - virtually one in every county - take a special place in the partnership and the natural resource conservation delivery system. As units of local government, conservation districts operate on the premise that local people know the most about local natural resource needs. Conservation districts link NRCS to local communities and to local priorities for natural resource conservation.

The Michigan Technical Committee, a group of approximately 40 members, fulfills a key partnership and advisory function. These individuals provide information, analyses and recommendations on implementing U.S. Department of Agriculture conservation programs. Membership on the committee is open to representatives of private organizations and businesses, tribal governments, state and federal agencies, and individuals who are knowledgeable or have expertise in natural resource conservation.



photo: Lynn Betts

Michigan NRCS Resource Conservationist Kim Graham (right) observes the native wildflower planting in this Montcalm County, Michigan landowner's field.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or familial status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact the USDA's TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC, 20250-9410 or call 202-720-5964 (voice or TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

